

MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



Office of Public Information

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MUSKEGON COURT GETS FEDERAL GRANT FOR CHILD SUPPORT PROJECTS

LANSING, MI, January 9, 2003 – The Muskegon County Family Court, which created a program for parents who have trouble paying child support, has received a \$199,772 grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to continue the program, the Michigan Supreme Court announced today.

Chief Justice Maura D. Corrigan said the grant “is a vote of confidence for this innovative program, which has helped struggling parents meet their child support obligations.”

Corrigan added that “The Muskegon County Family Court is the only court in the nation to receive one of these grants. This grant is not just a matter for congratulations. The court’s experience will teach us lessons that we can carry out state-wide for the benefit of Michigan’s children.”

The Muskegon program received one of only 12 Special Improvement Grants awarded by the HHS. The grant, which is based on performance, could be renewed after one year.

In a recent statement, Tommy G. Thompson, Secretary of Health and Human Services, said that the grants, which total over \$2.2 million, went to selected states, as well as faith-based, non-profit and tribal organizations. “The Special Improvement Grants are ... to enhance the child support program and improve the financial and emotional well being of children,” Thompson said.

The Michigan Supreme Court asked the Muskegon County Family Court, a division of the 14th Circuit Court, to apply for the grant after learning of the court’s innovative program. The court, in partnership with other local organizations, has used the program to help unemployed or underemployed parents who owe child support to find work. Through its “Noncustodial Parent Program,” the court refers parents to the Michigan Works! program for job training. Court officials meet with parents who have problems paying child support, help parents assess their needs, and develop a plan of action, which includes dealing with child support debts. Parents then get help finding work or job training. Court staff follow up with parents to make sure they are going to classes or work as required. Families and parents can also be referred to counseling.

Daniel J. Wright, manager of the State Court Administrative Office's Friend of the Court Bureau, said he is "delighted" for 14th Circuit Court Administrator Patricia A. Steele and others who initiated the program.

"Pat and her staff are very dedicated and are known for their creative approach to child support issues," said Wright. "Thanks to them, Muskegon is known as a 'can-do' county for child support."

Wright added that he and other court officials "are quite excited about what our state can learn from this program in Muskegon."

For more information about the HHS grants, visit the HHS web site at www.hhs.gov/news.

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